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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates an experimental trimester plan adopted by a Birmingham (Alabama) high school during the 1976-77 school year. The Birmingham trimester plan maintained the usual length school year, simply dividing it into three "mesters," rather than the traditional two. The plan also lengthened each class period to 85 minutes, so that each day ran from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and consisted of five class periods. Each teacher and student had classes scheduled for four of the five periods and was at school either from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. or from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The evaluation presented here is based on data from two survey questionnaires completed by teachers who were at the school both during the 1976-77 school year and during the 1975-76, when a conventional schedule was used. Findings of the surveys showed that 82 percent of the faculty had no difficulties in adjusting to the trimester, but 62.5 percent felt that students had not learned more than in previous years. Approximately 82 percent felt that paperwork had increased under the new schedule, and 50 percent felt they had no input into the scheduling process. It had been hoped that the trimester schedule would have particular benefits for the visual arts program; however, it proved only a qualified success in this respect. (JG)

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A Follow-up Study of ERIC No. ED 122416, Pilot Study of Ramsay High School, Birmingham Public School System, Birmingham, Alabama. The Trimester as it Relates to a Secondary Arts Program: Advantages, Disadvantages, and Opportunities Implied

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Prologue

I. General analysis of successes and failures after one year

II. Specific analysis as it applies to the Secondary Art Program

III. Observations and recommendations

IV. Appendix

PROLOGUE

The time for reassessment is here.

The trimester has endured the year and those, who would make it work, have endured the trimester.

Seriously, an evaluation of the success or failure, macro or micro, of the trimester plan must be made. No service would be achieved through glossing over the faults nor would any be gained by failing to cite the successes.

In the paper, Pilot Study at Ramsay High School, Birmingham Public School System, Birmingham, Alabama. The Trimester as it Relates to a Secondary Arts Program: Advantages, Disadvantages, and Opportunities Implied. ERIC No. ED 122416, a study was offered concerning the possible utilization of the trimester system by Ramsay High School here in Birmingham, with particular emphasis upon its effect on a Secondary Art Program.

That paper dealt first in generalities as the proposed plan would affect the entire school and specifically in the area of Art. It was approached from the viewpoint of a teacher, with the stated intent of reflecting the realities of the situation from the working personnel's side of the table. Certain areas of possible problems were identified and certain cautionary comments were made.

This paper, then, is a follow-up of the first in an effort to make available to those interested in those areas wherein difficulties (anticipated or otherwise) have appeared.

The information presented herein has been acquired through survey-questionnaires (two) presented to twenty members of the faculty who were at the school during the year 1975-76 (the last on the yearly system) and who were still members of the faculty during the year 1976-77. New faculty members were not

questioned, nor were those who had been re- signed, as they could make no valid comparisons or observations. Not all questionnaires were completed, and one was not returned. Anonymity was assured in the cover letter requesting no signatures.

I

It would be most easy to offer this paper as an attestation to the success, unqualified, of the Trimester Plan. But such would not be realistic: the Trimester was not without flaws. The flaws largely lay in the involvement of all personnel; with the decision-making operations retained in the hands of a very few and they, non-teachers. Surveys as to student interest and student needs were not made on a continuing basis, nor were considerations of faculty abilities and desires always observed. As a consequence, classes were offered which students would not elect to take, apparently because of lack of interest or poorly scheduled times. This resulted in the cancellation of classes after scheduling had begun, necessitating rescheduling of classes thereby creating disturbances in class-balance.

In some cases, the courses dealt with unfamiliar subject matter and needed to be sold to the students, but were not. In some cases, the subjects were unrealistically geared for other than high school level. In some cases, the courses dealt with material of low-interest value to adolescent students' tastes. In some cases, there were restrictive criteria, so that a student who would have liked a certain course was denied admission to it by not having the invitation of the teacher.

Contrary to expectations (in the previous paper), 82% of the faculty experienced no difficulties in adjusting to the trimester. Clearly, any

hesitancy or dislike of the trimester, on the part of the teacher, was eliminated or greatly reduced by the experiencing of it. One of the significantly different qualities, that of longer class periods, apparently proved no problem or cause of problems to 86% of the faculty.

No problems were apparently felt in altering the curriculum from the local school board level, although 47% of the faculty felt that the old curriculum had simply been readjusted to fit the new time system. This, of course, should be expected in that the material retained from one to the other had validity and useful application.

Of particular interest was the fact that 62.5% of the faculty felt that the students had not learned more than they had in previous years. This, despite the fact that these same teachers had attempted to teach more (or, thought they had)--71% expressed this opinion.

The teachers, upon subsequent questioning, expressed the opinion that these factors attributed to the lower learning achievement:

Long Class Periods

Interrupted or shortened class periods

Students' inability to use time well

Inadequate range of supplementary material

Lack of interest in learning

Clearly, this fear expressed in the first paper, was reasonable and is borne out by the teachers' observations, above.

An additional observation can be made that although new subject matter was attempted in a new time framework, no funds or materials were received by approximately 50% of the faculty. Over 50% (57%) received no new text for old

topics; 67% received no text-materials for new topics; 44% received no supplementary material, whatsoever; 60% received no new equipment. Over 53% reported no improvements made to the physical learning environment (i.e., the classroom). 47% reported receiving no monies with which to make improvements or to acquire new materials. This evidence of non-support in the only areas wherein administrators can support (monies, materials, equipment, repairs and improvements) indicates an area which not only needs to be changed, but is capable of change.

One item which should be of particular concern to the administrators is that of teacher involvement or lack of involvement. To this teacher, this appears to be the most serious flaw in the implementation of the trimester system, as experienced.

For 69% (beginning in spring of 1976) there was involvement, initially, in the development of the trimester plan, but as the year (1976-77) progressed, that percentage dropped to only 53%. Fully 31% reported that no effort at all had been expended to involve them in the planning: 63% reported that some effort had been expended to involve them: only 6% reported that much effort had been made.

Conversely, although many of the faculty felt uninvolved in the program, 71% would have liked to have contributed more and 67% felt that they might have contributed measurably to the program. This represents a tragic misuse or non-use of abilities and ideas.

Perhaps of great concern, and certainly an area sometimes lightly skipped over is that of scheduling. There was, apparently, an uneven application of justice and consideration. While 19% were always satisfied with their schedules and 47% were usually satisfied, 18% were but occasionally pleased and 6% never. These same percentages prevailed when the teachers asked for consideration,

6% never received a favorable response

18% occasionally received favorable action

41% usually received favorable consideration

29% always received a favorable response

and,

6% never asked for any consideration.

Strangely, although 69% were queried as to what they wished to teach prior to scheduling, 31% were not! 50% were asked when (hours) they wanted to teach, but 50% were not! Overall, 53% occasionally, or less frequently, have been unsuccessful in attaining what they requested. Indeed, to further underline the inequities, 54% of those not contacted initiated a contact themselves, and of that group only 18% were often successful.

The greatest flaw in the scheduling process was the non-involvement of the implementors. When asked "have you felt that you had input into the scheduling process?", 50% felt that they had none, 44% felt that they had some, and only 6% felt that they had much. 33% felt that the scheduling procedure was actuated in an arbitrary manner and 19% felt that there was a punitive quality to that arbitrariness. Of the teachers, 75% felt that not all received an equal degree of consideration during the procedure. As a result, 59% had schedules which were considered to be less than satisfactory, one to three times. The unsatisfactoriness was identified as being the result of undesired hours (33%) and undersired subject matter (33%).

As far as teachers were concerned, there was a general approval, with some reservation, of the trimester plan. Apparently, the greatest reservation deals with the late schedule working day as well as the four class mester. 81% of the faculty indicated a choice of the trimester over the previous system: with one late schedule (9:25 - 3:50) per year 67% would still prefer the

trimester: with two or three late schedules, the precentages of preference drops to 47%. This preference reflects the general preference of the faculty: 67% prefer the early schedule, 16.5% do not, and 16.5% have no preference. When shown a chart of all (or almost all) schedule possibilities, the faculty preferred the early schedules (8:00 - 2:35) with or without a break period; this preference is much less with four classes, and least of all with four classes on the late schedule. The presence of a break period within the schedule results in a more desirable schedule.

The teachers consistently expressed dislike of the four class work day when there was no provision made for break time. Although 88% of the teachers felt that when teaching three classes there was sufficient time for personal comfort, only 18% felt the time to be sufficient when there were four classes. Obviously, the back-to-back arrangement of four 85-minute-long classes is proving excessively demanding, physically and mentally. To provide a break in a four class schedule will extend the day and make the schedule even more unsatisfactory (8:00 - 3:50). Unless some provision can be made, this will continue to be a point of dissension. For, in addition, 65% of the faculty felt that some individuals were favored and received more break-time, or more reasonable schedules, than others.

The question of "paper work", the unrelenting nemesis of the teacher, was not resolved under the trimester plan. Of the faculty, 82% felt that the paper work had increased, 12% felt it had remained the same, and 6% felt it had decreased. This may be a problem intimately interrelated with the structure of the trimester. However, it is to be hoped a solution may be reached. A similarly associated problem is the quantity of class preparations required. 59% of the faculty reported an increase in the number of preparations, 29%

were required to do the same number as in previous years, and 12% reported having to do fewer. In addition, the teaching personnel felt that the time for preparation was less adequate than under the semester system. Percentage-wise the adequacy of time dropped from 69% to 57%, under the trimester.

Two areas, not noted in the earlier paper are those dealing with faculty meetings and student club meetings. The schedule, as devised did not provide time for clubs to meet nor for auditorium programs. This has resulted in the weakening of the clubs' structure and function, and destroyed a sense of continuity in activities. It seems unheard of that a teacher would resent not being able to attend faculty meetings, but if those meetings are used as they should be to vote on issues or dispense information then those individuals who have classes at the time of the scheduled meetings fall into the categories of the disfranchised and uninformed.

II

With respect to the Visual Arts Program, the trimester has been a qualified success. As expected, the extended class period has proven beneficial as far as student output and consistency in creative performance are concerned. The opportunity to offer variety in subject matter has proven attractive to the students. However, it has increased the amount of time expended in preparation and the amount of monies needed in support of the program. With the increased and specialized class period, the students' are able to produce much more than under the previous system.

A difficulty has arisen in the form of scheduling. A failure to accede to the stated requirement of "dirty" classes following "clean" classes has produced some problems in that much of the clean-up-time waste has not been

eliminated. Also, in this year, it has been impossible to provide art classes for all the students desiring them.

In the spring of 1976, a survey was made to determine student interest. This form was given to all students asking them to indicate their wishes. From this, a determination was made as to an approximate figure for classes needed. But one teacher could not provide sufficient instruction to meet the demand. Some effort was made, but not always consistently, by having personnel schedule seniors first, then juniors, then sophomores. This device seemed the fairest ways to make art available to all who desired it.

From the results of the survey, it was initially determined to offer three classes - Basic Art, Printmaking, Sculpture. However, after scheduling began in the fall, it became apparent that this was not successfully meeting the need, so an additional Basic Art class was scheduled, with this resultant schedule:

Basic Art

Printmaking

Basic Art

Sculpture

This proved to be a very tiring schedule. A better arrangement would have been to put the two Basic classes first, one following the other. The Basic Art class has proven to be a difficult, exhausting course in that one-to-one teaching must prevail. There is so much new knowledge and skill to be taught! Also, as the schedule stood, the "put-out/put-up" procedure of material distribution was doubled.

An additional error in thinking, was the assumption that students wanted a fourth period class. It was found to conflict with the athletic program

(many of whose students take art) and with the very real needs of the student who works after school.

The winter schedule, Basic Art, Preparation time, Sculpture, and Printmaking proved to be far more successful. It was still impossible to schedule every student into art who wanted art. Unfortunately, one teacher can only teach so many classes and so many students per class. Also, by the winter mester, the football season is over, baseball has not begun, and basketball practice apparently does not prove a problem, possibly because those athletes who had 4th period for training were able to elect an art class the third.

The Spring mester has proven a disaster - schedule-wise;

Independent study in art

Basic art

Sculpture

Preparation time & lunch

Personal art

The administration's wishes to offer fifth period classes proved unjustified in that sutdents in the South and in an unair-conditioned building did not want to endure the overwhelming discomfort that such a class would bring. (Had a survey been made, this fact would have been revealed!) This factor plus the ever-present working hours of the students resulted in a class with three students. This mester's scheduling was a major disappointment for the class scheduled for this fifth period was to have been the most innovative, explorative, and attractive to students not otherwise being reached. Further, the manner in which all art classes were scheduled prevented many from taking the classes though they wanted to. With no art being offered the first or the fourth period, an injustice was done to the students. Therefore, a class called

Independent Study in Art was set up for those students who were capable of self-directed work at the first period. This is proving inordinately difficult to schedule, for the day is very long.

The forecast problem of space, that is, inadequacy of space, has not been rectified. But fiscal support has been adequate to liberal.

III

Although, basically, the teachers are in support of the trimester, there are certain actions which would make for a more successful second year in the program. Indeed, these actions might be considered by other schools contemplating the adoption of the trimester. These observations and recommendations are offered:

1. Involve all teachers in all planning. They need not make the final decision, but they are the best salespeople and they are the implementors.

2. Teachers, even old-time, tradition-oriented teachers, adapt well to change.

3. After student needs are considered, scheduling must be in accord with teacher wishes and preferences. There must be no hint of unfairness, punitiveness or simple arbitrariness. (Whim and accident must not rule!)

4. Pre-surveys of student wants and needs and consultation with teachers are essential before scheduling is done.

5. New materials must be made available as replacement of or supplements to the old.

6. More time must be made available for preparation and for comfort breaks.

7. Effort must be made to reduce the load of paperwork.

8. Serious consideration must be given to the elimination of the four-class mester.

ART SURVEY

TO: Ramsay High School Students (grades 9, 10, 11)

It seems fairly certain that next year (1976-1977), Ramsay High School will adopt the "tri-mester" plan. This means that, instead of two "mesters" we will have three "mesters". There will be fewer classes taken each "mester", but the periods will be longer. These longer periods and the new arrangement of the school year make it possible to introduce new subjects using new and different approaches.

I am asking each of you, if you are interested in taking Art, to give me your preferences and opinions.

I hope to teach the following subjects:

_____1. Basic Art: a beginning art course which a student must take before he can take any other art course. This course will cover all the phases of drawing, painting, and design.

_____2. Sculpture: all forms of three-dimensional art, to include work in clay, plaster, wood, wire, as well as "junk-" and "bottle-" art.

_____3. Printmaking: all types and ways of making designs (such as illustrations, monograms, zodiac signs, etc.) and printing them on paper, cloth, wood, etc.

_____4. Drawing and Painting: specialized individual work in drawing and painting - for those students seriously interested in art as a hobby or a career.

_____5. Personal Art: the making of items for individual use, such as jewelry, dress accessories, and decorative items for the home.

These are the subjects I am considering. If you have any suggestions, I will certainly give them thought. To help in next year's planning, please indicate (if you wish to take art) your preferences by writing 1, 2, 3, etc. in the blank before each title. If you want to suggest another course, write the name of it here with a brief description of it.

Please write your name, session room and grade here.

Thank you,

F. Kegley
Art teacher

March 24, 1977

To: Ramsay Faculty (Regular Staff)

This is a survey-questionaire which I am conducting with Dr. Marie Blackwell of U.A.B. as a follow-up study on my paper, Pilot Study at Ramsay High School, Birmingham Public School System, Birmingham, Alabama. The Trimester Plan as it Relates to a Secondary Arts Program: Advantages, Disadvantages, and Opportunities Implied. ERIC No. ED 122415.

Numerous requests (according to Dr. Blackwell) have been made by educators contemplating the adoption of the Tri-mester for this study prior to their committment to this plan. Because of these requests and also because of the apparent need for changes within the system as we have experienced it, I am asking for your help. You, as the operational personnel, can most readily pinpoint the failures, faults, and imperfections and by recommendation (through making them known) effect reasonable and proper improvements.

Please, if you will, complete the attached questionaire and return it to me by Monday, March 28, 1977. Do not sign the questionaire.

Thank-you so very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Florence A. Kegley

Florence A. Kegley

1. If you could make a choice (and not be penalized), would you choose the old system at Ramsay (before 1976-77)?

yes_____, no_____

2. In your opinion, do you feel that the tri-mester plan (because of lengthened class time) has allowed you to teach

more_____, less_____, same_____?

3. Do You feel that the students have learned more under the trimester plan?

yes_____, no_____, same amount_____

4. Have you felt a greater need for curricular materials than before?

yes_____, no_____.

5. Have you been able to acquire new materials?

easily_____, rarely_____, after repeated requests_____

6. Have you introduced new material (subject-matter) in your classes?

extensively_____, some _____, very little_____, none_____

7. Have you been encouraged to introduce new material?

yes_____, no_____

8. Have you had adequate time for the preparation and/or acquisition of this new material?

yes_____, no_____

9. Have you recieved new textbooks for your topic?

yes_____, no_____

10. Have you recieved textbooks (or text material) for a new topic?

yes_____, no_____

11. Have you recieved additional books, magazines or papers for supplementary use?

none_____, a few_____, some _____, many_____

12. Other than desks, have you recieved new equipment for use in your room?

none_____, 1-3 items _____, over 3 _____

13. Other than,desks, have any physical changes been effected in your room to improve the learning environment?

new paint_____, repaired windows_____, replaced shades_____

improved lighting_____, improved heating/cooling _____

14. Have you recieved additional monies for the purchase of new materials?

none_____, under $50_____, $50-$100_____, over$100_____

15. Have you found that scheduling of your classes was satisfactory to you, personally?

never_____, occassionally_____, usually_____, always_____

16. Were your requests for consideration during scheduling met?

never_____, occasionally_____, usually_____, always_____

17. Were you contacted as to what you wanted to teach?

yes_____, no_____

When you wanted to teach?

yes_____, no_____

18. Were your requests met?

never_____, rarely_____, sometimes_____, often_____

19. If no contacted you, did you initiate a contact?

yes_____, no_____

19. Were the requests resultingfrom a self-initiated contact met?

never_____, rarely_____, sometimes_____, often_____

20. Have you felt that you had imput into the scheduling process?

none_____, some_____, much_____

21. Have you felt that scheduling was, in any way, arbitrary?

yes_____, no_____

22. Punitive?

yes_____, no_____

23. Do you feel that all teaching personnel received the same degree of consideration during the scheduling procedure?

yes_____, no_____

24. If you had unsatisfactory schedules, were they unsatisfactory because of hours?

yes_____, no_____

because of subject matter

yes_____, no_____

25. How many unsatisfactory schedules have you had?

one _____, two_____, three_____, none_____

26. Have your class loads been roughly equivalent to those of the previous system?

In size: yes_____, no_____

In ability: yes_____, no_____

27. How has the number of preparations you have been required to make this year compared with those of last year?

more_____, less_____, same_____

28. What was the maximum number of preparations you have had to make?

Trimester_____, last year_____

29. Have you had adequate time for these preparations?

trimester: yes_____, no_____

last year: yes_____, no_____

30. Do you feel that you have had sufficient break-time under the trimester system for personal comfort?

first mester: yes_____, no_____

second mester: yes_____, no_____

third mester: yes_____, no _____

31. Was the break time adequate when you had four classes?

yes_____, no_____

When you had three classes?

yes_____, no_____

32. Do you feel that some personnel had more break time than others?

yes_____, no_____

33. Under the trimester system has the paper work increased?

yes_____, no_____

decreased?

yes_____, no_____

remained the same?

yes_____, no_____

34. Have you had lunchroom duty (including supervision of your classes) this year?

yes_____, no_____

35. Do You feel that supervision of the lunchroom was equitably distributed?

yes_____, no_____

36. Do you feel that this duty is rightly a part of your teaching responsibilities?

yes_____, no_____

37. When you had this duty, did you have a sufficient amount of time for your lunch?

yes_____, no_____

38. Do you feel that the needs of the students were properly met?

yes_____, no_____

39. Do you feel that the students have benefited from the trimester system?

yes_____, no_____

40. Were these benefits in the form of new material learned?

yes_____, no_____

More opportunity for expression?

yes_____, no_____

More opportunity for advancement?

yes_____, no_____

41. In your opinion, was there sufficient student imput?

yes_____, no_____

42. To your knowledge, were students surveyed as to needs and desires?

first mester: yes_____, no_____

second Mester: yes_____, no_____

third mester: yes_____, no_____

43. Do you feel that the administration(Downtown) has properly backed the new system?

yes_____, no_____

44. Have you had input into the development of the trimester system?

initially: yes_____, no_____

as the year progressed? yes_____, no_____

45. Has an effort been made to involve you?

none_____, some_____, much_____

46. Would you have liked to have contributed more to the development of the system?

yes_____, no_____

47. Do you feel that you had ideas which would have measureably improved the system?

yes_____, no_____

48. Do you feel that the administration (school) has correctly directed the trimester?

most of the time_____ all of the time _____

some of the time_____ none of the time_____

49. In your opinion, do you feel that the trimester is significantly different from the old system (as far as educational activities are concerned?

yes_____, no_____

50. Do you feel that students have experienced any greater curricular enrichment under the trimester system?

yes_____, no_____

51. Have the extended class periods made for better teaching?

yes_____, no_____

52. Have these longer class periods created problems?

yes_____, no_____

54. Have the students been capebleof effective use of the 85 minute period?

yes_____, no_____

55. Have you experience any difficulties in adjusting to the trimester?

yes_____, no_____

56. Has the established curriculum been adjusted to develop new classes?

yes_____, no_____

57. Do you feel that old curriculum has simply been readjusted to fit the trimester system?

yes_____, no_____

April 4, 1977

To: Ramsey Faculty (Regular Staff)

I appreciate so much your response to the earlier questionaire. However, there were some points not covered or unclear. I am asking you, therefore, if you will, to complete the attached and return to me by Wednesday, April 6, 1977.

Thank you.

Florence A. Kegley

Florence A Kegley

1. Of the following schedules (under the trimester system) which would be satisfactory? Unsatisfactory?

		1ST PD	2ND PD	3RD PD	4TH PD	5TH PD	SAT.	UN-SAT.
THREE CLASSES (8:00-2:35)	A	X	X	X				
	B		X	X	X			
	C	X		X	X			
	D	X	X		X			
THREE CLASSES (9:25-3:55)	E		X	X		X		
	F		X		X	X		
FOUR CLASSES	G	X	X	X	X			
	H		X	X	X	X		
	I	X	X	X		X		
OTHER	J							

2. Which of the above schedules have you had? Indicate below.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J

3. How often? Indicate number of times below.

4. Which of the following lunch schedules would be most satisfactory to you? Please indicate by checking.

#1 11:05-11:35	#2 11:35-12:05	#3 12:05-12:35	#4 12:35-1:05

5. Which have you had? #1___, #2___, #3___, #4___

6. How many times? #1___, #2___, #3___, #4___

7. As well as you can remember, how many students have you had in your classes this year?

	1	2	3	4	5
FALL					
WINTER					
SPRING					

8. If you can, put in the approximate figures for last year's classes, below.

1	2	3	4	5	6

9. If you had one 9:25-3:55 schedule per year, would you prefer the trimester over the semester system?

Yes _____

No_____

10. If you had two 9:25-3:55 schedules per year, would you prefer the trimester?

Yes _____

No _____

11. If you had three 9:25-3:55 schedules per year, would you prefer the trimester?

Yes _____

No _____

12. Do you prefer the early schedule (8:00-2:35)?

Yes_____

No_____

No preference _____

13. If you are a club sponsor, have you had adequate meeting time with your group? Yes_____, No_____.

14. Indicate the number of preparations required:

Last year _____

This year: Fall _____ Winter _____, Spring _____

15. In the previous survey, 63% of you indicated that you felt that the students learned the same amount (or less) as last year. To what do you attribute this?

Long class periods _____

Interrupted or shortened class periods _____

Students' inability to use time well _____

Inadequate range of supplementary material available _____

Other (list please) _____